

[cjohns@emory.edu](mailto:cjohns@emory.edu)

Dear Cathryn Johnson,

I am writing to file a formal complaint with the Laney Graduate School Grievance Committee regarding the abuses of my advisor, Clifton Crais, when I was a student in the History Ph.D. program.

I have made reports to both my former department and the OEI about Dr. Crais, who was my advisor until February 2017, when I became the advisee of Dr. Pamela Scully. I will copy below the full account of Dr. Crais' inappropriate and discriminatory actions, as well as the retaliation he attempted when I first reported him. I have informed the OEI that Dr. Crais discriminated against me by discouraging me from continuing in the history PhD program because I disclosed that I suffer from mental health problems, and he recently threatened retaliation against me for filing a complaint against him with the history department.

After I disclosed my mental health problems, Dr. Crais acted in ways that were at best careless and capricious, and at worst maliciously designed to sabotage my academic career. Despite having verbally approved my exam list the prior spring, Dr. Crais demanded that I completely revise the list a month before I was allowed to take the exam, then gave me an exam question referencing a text not included in my list, and failed me on the exam he graded because I did not cite other texts that were not on my exams list. It is my understanding based on conversations with other members of my committee that he encouraged them via email to give me failing marks as well. I consider all of these to be abuses of his authority as an advisor. I have attached here documentation supporting my original complaint.

However, when I reported them to my department I was told that they could take no action because I was no longer a student there. Of course, this is a double bind for students because we are still in a position of dependence on our advisors when we are in our programs. After my committee gave me failing marks on exams, I still wished to at least complete a Master's degree, and the only advisor available to work with me other than Dr. Crais was his wife, Dr. Pamela Scully, and two other members of my exams committee subsequently served on my thesis committee. I thus feared that if I filed a complaint against Crais, he was still in a position to prevent me from obtaining a Master's thesis. His threat to legally retaliate for the complaint I filed in July 2018 convinces me those fears were well founded.

An abusive advisor should not be allowed to treat his students in such an arbitrary fashion. I hope that there is some mechanism at Emory to hold such actions to account.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Cid Standifer  
[cid.standifer@gmail.com](mailto:cid.standifer@gmail.com)

Full text of OEI complaint and original complaint to my department:

Date of most recent incident: August 31, 2018

Location: By email

Description:

Clifton Crais retaliated against me for making a discrimination complaint to my department against him. I will include the full details of my original complaint below. In response to my original complaint he sent the following email:

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From: **Crais, Clifton C** <[ccrais@emory.edu](mailto:ccrais@emory.edu)>

Date: Fri, Aug 31, 2018 at 9:08 AM

Subject: Your complaint

To: "[cid.standifer@gmail.com](mailto:cid.standifer@gmail.com)" <[cid.standifer@gmail.com](mailto:cid.standifer@gmail.com)>

Cc: "Crais, Clifton C" <[ccrais@emory.edu](mailto:ccrais@emory.edu)>

Dear Ms. Standifer,

You have until Tuesday morning, September 4, 2018, 9:00 EST, to retract your complaint, with apology, after which I will initiate a series of legal actions against you, including defamation. Your complaints are utterly untethered from the facts and, indeed, are based on untruths that seem to have no other objective but to impugn my character. I have kept an extensive written and electronic record, which disprove your allegations and demonstrate a consistent pattern of unprofessional conduct on your part, beginning in your first year in the graduate program at Emory University and continuing until you ceased being my advisee.

Clifton Crais

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Here are the contents of my original complaint (this was submitted to Dr. Yanna Yannakakis on July 4, 2018):

- In the early summer of 2016, in a personal meeting, Dr. Crais expressed skepticism in my ability to complete the PhD program due to the mental illness diagnoses I disclosed to him. He warned me that "academia is a difficult career for people with mental illness." I consider Dr. Crais' discouragement at pursuing my chosen career on the basis of my disclosure of disabilities inappropriate.
- In May, before I departed Atlanta for summer Swahili training in Athens, Ohio, Crais verbally approved my reading list for field I of my exams. I proceeded to study on the basis of that list.
- In early fall 2016, Dr. Crais informed me that he considered it academic dishonesty to study for exams using notes written by other students. This is not an official Laney Graduate School policy, and I have not encountered any other students in the history department whose advisors considered using other students' notes academically dishonest. In fact, my understanding is that other professors explicitly encouraged their students to use notes. To the best of my knowledge, none of Dr. Crais' previous students had been discouraged from using other students' notes. It appears that Dr. Crais discouraged only me personally from using others' notes. This strikes me as inappropriate and unprofessional. I understand that

Dr. Crais subsequently discussed this issue with Dr. Thomas Rogers, who should be able to corroborate my recollection.

- I informed Dr. Crais in a meeting that if it was indeed his policy not to allow the use of other students' notes, he should generate a written memo on the subject and disseminate it to all of his students. He agreed to do so. However, I never received such a memo. To the best of my knowledge, none of his other advisees received such a memo either. His failure to make his expectations clear to myself and other students was unprofessional.
- On or around Nov. 4, Dr. Crais without warning announced that I would not be allowed to take exams or teach in the spring, and expressed his opinion that I should make arrangements to leave the program. He gave no detailed reasoning of his decision, other than that I "made some poor decisions." Which decisions he considered poor were not specified. The suddenness of his decision and his means of announcing and explaining it were, in my opinion, unprofessional. Ms. Katie Wilson, administrative assistant for graduate studies in the history department, was present for this meeting and should be able to corroborate my recollection.
- In the pass/fail research section with Dr. Crais for which I was registered for the fall semester of 2016, Dr. Crais awarded me an unsatisfactory grade. His requirements for satisfactory performance were at no point explained. He never provided me with any attempt at reasoning for describing my performance as unsatisfactory. I consider this unprofessional.
- In December, shortly before Christmas, in a meeting between Dr. Crais, myself and Dr. Tom Rogers, Dr. Crais expressed a tentative willingness to allow me to take exams on the condition that I revise my reading list, stating that my existing list, which he had previously approved, was "weird." I did so within the following week. Between Dr. Crais' approval of the new list, which included approximately 100 new articles and books, and the scheduled start of my exams, this left less than one month. I believe that for Dr. Crais to approve my list verbally, then retract that approval with so little time left before the rescheduled start of my exams, was inappropriate and unprofessional. Dr. Thomas Rogers was present for this meeting and should be able to corroborate my recollection.
- Of the two questions written by Dr. Crais for my examination, I chose to answer the question regarding the historiography of African independence from the 1960s to present, despite the fact that it asked for a response to a quote, presented without citation, from a book that was on neither the reading list Dr. Crais had approved in May 2016, nor the new list he approved in December 2016. I found and read the article, "Introduction: Towards the New Order, 1945–1963" from *The Oxford History of East Africa, Volume III* by John Lonsdale and D. Low, and included it in my response to the question within the allotted time. Nonetheless, I consider Dr. Crais' inclusion of a work not included on my reading list in my final exam, whether through carelessness or for other reasons, inappropriate and unprofessional.
- Dr. Crais gave my answer to his exam question a failing grade. When I requested an explanation, he said that my answer did not fully answer the question because it failed to cite the historiography regarding independence before 1980. There were, however, no books or articles included on my final approved exam list written before 1980 that discussed independence, with the exception of *Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, who was not a historian. I believe I cited Fanon. I no longer have copies of my exam responses, but I believe the department has them on file and should be able to verify both the wording of the question and the inclusion of Fanon in my answer. For Dr. Crais to

approve a list that did not include any historiography on independence written before 1980, then reject my exam answer because I failed to cite such historiography, whether through carelessness or for other reasons, was inappropriate and unprofessional.

Please let me know if you have any questions. I would also appreciate an estimate of when you expect to begin investigation into my complaint, and/or when you expect my complaint to be closed. I also, of course, wish to be informed about your decision in this case.

Very respectfully,

Lauren (Cid) Standifer